

WHAT PATTY DID

by CLAUDINE SISSON



Santa Claus.

AND it had come to pass that on this day before Christmas a man not old in years sat in his room at a hotel in a strange town and felt himself of all the world the most lonely. High and low, rich and poor, mingled in the procession of happy shoppers without. He alone had no thought for Santa Claus.

It went back five years. He, the son of a railroad magnate, had dared to fall in love with the blue-eyed daughter of a locomotive driver on his father's road—a man whose face and hands carried grime—who dwelt in a cottage—who had no society outside of daily toilers. And he had dared stand before the father who thought himself specially created and say:

"Father, I'm going to be married."

"Well?"

"To Gladys Davis."

"Never heard of her."

"The daughter of one of our engineers."

There was a moment of painful suspense and then the storm broke.

"You shall not! You are either a fool or a lunatic to think of it. An engineer's daughter! Think of your mother-of-me-of your sister—the disgrace! You must have lost your senses!"

"But I am to marry her," was the steady reply.

"I say no! If the jade has trapped you into an engagement bay her off. The father must use his influence or take his discharge."

"But we love and are promised to each other."

In the next half hour the father stormed and cajoled. If the son insisted on such a marriage he would be cast out by the family; he would be ridiculed even by the common people. And the magnate ended up with:

"Fred, I will have the engineer called up here and give him a check for a thousand dollars and tell him that this nonsense must end."

"We shall be married three days from now," was his answer.

In reply to that the father pointed to the door, and the son bowed and passed out to be son no longer. He had money that had been left him by an aunt, and the father could not threaten him with poverty.

Love may always be right, but it can be so influenced as to be seemingly a mistake. The marriage took place and Fred Dillingham was ostracized. He was not kindly welcomed in the other stratum. If there is a gulf between the rich man and the workman the latter resents intrusion as much as the former. There was love, but after a few months it was influenced from both sides. Both husband and wife were made to fear that a grave mistake had been made. They fought away the idea and sought to hold their love, but that brought irritations and vexations and culminated in misunderstandings and quarrels. After two years there was a separation. Neither really desired it. It was what the gossips had predicted, and what they strove to bring about.

There was more sorrow than anger when the young husband turned his back on wife and infant a year old and went out into the world as a wanderer. The wife went back to her father's cottage, but not to struggle with poverty. The husband being generous to her.

Five long years, and Fred Dillingham had not been heard of. As an outlaw without a family, whom should he write to and why? At three years of age the child, who had been named Patty, wondered in her childish way why she hadn't a papa. At five she demanded to know. At six she stood before the embarrassed mother in indignation and threatened to go out and find one.

And at last the wanderer had re-crossed the sea and headed for his home. He was tired and weary and lonely. Home? But he had none! He had left it when he left wife and baby. This struck him like a sudden blow, though he had all along realized it in a general way. No home—no wife—no child! That was why he had left the train and taken lodgings. He had no place to go. With money in his pockets, he was a tramp.

And to know that Christmas was at hand, and to hear the jingle of sleigh

bells and catch the shouts of children on the street—to wonder if his child still lived, and to wonder further what old Santa Claus would bring her—why, the man cursed the fears he could not keep back.

A quarter of an hour later the outlaw was down on the street. He would mingle with the throng. He would enter the stores under the evergreen branches and look about him—aye, make a purchase and be Santa Claus to some big-eyed child on the street. He was an outlaw, but the world should not crowd him quite to the edge. He was almost smiling as he crowded his way into a big store, and he was looking about him when a small, warm hand was cuddled into his and a child's voice said:

"Please take care of me 'till mamma finds me—I'm lost!"

It was a little girl, and on her face was both a smile and a look of entreaty.

"Why, of course," replied the outlaw, pressing her hand and drawing her back a little. "So you came here with your mother after Christmas things and got separated?"

"That's it, only I think she ran away from me so that I shouldn't know what Santa Claus was going to bring me tomorrow night."

"I hope it will be something nice."

"Oh, it will be. Are you buying something for your little girl?"

"No-o."

"Maybe she's dead?"

"I—I don't know."

The girl looked up and noticed the grave expression on the outlaw's face, and cuddled closer to him and said:

"I'm sorry if I have hurt you. Mamma says I talk too much. I've just thought that maybe you are not married at all!"

"I guess that's pretty near it," replied the outlaw as he tried to laugh, but made poor work of it.

"Well, if you haven't got any little girl I haven't got any papa. What you going to buy?"

"Why, whatever you say?"

"But not for me?"

"Yes, for you. We'll select something, and then when your mother comes I'll ask her if she'll let you have it."

"I hope she will. You look to be such a nice man that she shouldn't refuse. I picked you out as the very nicest man that came along."

"Thank you," said the outlaw as he felt his heart grow big. "Now, then, about this doll. Real hair, eyes that wink, pink shoes and almost as big as you are. She'll be a sister to you."

"And how much is it?"

"Only ten dollars."

"My, but can you pay that much! If you can you must be rich."

"But you see I have no little girl of my own."

"That's so. Isn't Christmas nice? Do you know—there's mamma over there! Let me run and tell her."

The outlaw turned his back on the crowd and gritted his teeth and winked his eyes. He had been hit hard. Three or four minutes passed and then a hand pulled at his and a voice said:

"Please, mister nice man, tell me your name, that I may introduce you to mamma. I think she will let me have the doll."

The outlaw turned and gasped and his face went white.

"Gladys!"

"You here!"

"And you!"

"And this is our daughter?"

"Our Patty. Father was discharged from the road and moved over here to take another run."

It was the next day, and Patty was sitting on her father's knee and the happy mother was wiping tears from her eyes, when the child said:

"Say, mamma, I just picked him out as the very nicest man in all that big crowd, and I didn't make any mistake, did I? Don't anybody sit down on my doll and give her a pain!"

"That's so. Isn't Christmas nice? Do you know—there's mamma over there! Let me run and tell her."

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FANELLA'S CHRISTMAS SUPPER

By SUSAN GLENN



(Copyright.)

TO Miss Fanella Fenway the flurry of Christmas snow was not beautiful as she hurried through deepening twilight.

Though possessing a certain distinctive air, her coat was pitifully thin and inadequate. Though neatly blackened, her shoes leaked and she wore no rubbers. It is small wonder that the storm seemed merciless and cold. But when she turned in at the big stone gateway, her shoulders straightened proudly.

"The old Fenway place," she murmured, glancing about the gloomy, unkempt grounds, "and I am the last of the Fenways."

"If you were not it would go hard with them," interjected that other half of Miss Fenway's nature that was always ridiculing her Fenway pride. "Unless," with malicious emphasis, "they changed to be also impervious to cold and hunger!"

Miss Fanella's lips trembled as she unlocked the great front door—upon no condition did she ever leave or enter the house by any of its other numerous entrances.

She lighted the small oil lamps that stood on the marble top of the hall buffet, placed her coat and hat on the carved rack, and peered closely into the great mirror.

"Tomorrow is Christmas, and your birthday," she whispered accusingly, "and—no one has remembered it! Not one of your old friends! You are alone."

"Of course, I am alone," spoke the Fenway pride complacently. "Who is

friend now the wife of a successful financier.

Miss Fanella's hand trembled, her face was drawn and white.

"A nurse maid," she moaned at last bitterly. "A common nurse maid! She put it kindly, and it is kind of her to think of me in my destitution, but that is what it means. Yet, isn't it better than cold and loneliness and starvation? I'm tired of being different from other people. I'll try being as common as the commonest for a while."

Suddenly the great bell pealed through the resounding old rooms. She lifted the little lamp in wonderment and threaded her way again through the icy gloom. No tradespeople called at the house, and certainly not at the big front door! And generations of superiority had taught the neighbors the futility of calling at the Fenway portals.

Nelson Travers stood in the porch, the big white flakes heaped upon his broad shoulders.

"Good evening, Fanella," he said as if he had parted with her but yesterday. "Tomorrow is your birthday, I believe, and Christmas, too. Will you come for a ride with me?"

Miss Fanella gasped, as well she might. This, after fifteen years of silence! Had it taken him so long to recover from the repulse of old Madam Fenway?

"What will the neighbors think?" she gasped.

"You are thirty-six tomorrow, are you not, Fanella? Isn't that old enough to act as you please regardless of the neighbors?"

"I suppose it is, Nelson," she admitted with a smile. "But where?"

"Will you trust me this once, Fanella? I promise to bring you back whenever you wish."

Miss Fanella looked into the white night. Was she dreaming, or could this unlikely thing really have happened in the deadening monotony of her life?

What difference did it make, anyway. Henceforth she would be only a nursemaid. She looked back into Nelson Travers' honest eyes pleading with her to trust him. About her the stately old furniture upon which her pride had fed so many years, pleaded in vain.

"Yes," she said, "I'll come. I do not know how far I shall go, though."

The man stepped into the old hall and held her coat. His lips closed over his displeasure when he felt the weight of it.

She did not remember the worn gloves on the hall table, and only thought about locking the door when she saw Travers slip the key into his deep pocket.

Wrapped in robes, she seemed unconscious of the storm, realizing only the pleasant sensation of companionship and warmth.

She was not even surprised when he drew up before a low, ample house and lifted her carefully to the door-stone.

"I'll be in in a minute," he told her. "Take off your wraps and get warm."

Miss Fanella, her heart beating high at her own audacity, opened the broad door.

The wide, low rooms within opened pleasantly together, lighted by candles on the mantels, and by softly shaded lamps.

"How pleasant," said Miss Fanella aloud, going to the open fire, and thinking of her little stove in the butler's pantry.

"I have dreamed of you sitting here," said Travers quietly, coming to her. "And now I am going to ask you to eat supper with me—a Christmas supper, you know."

"I shall be most delighted," answered Miss Fanella with a smile. The Fenway pride was mute for once. It was a quiet supper. Fanella poured the tea, conscious that her companion's eyes were following her, and she enjoyed herself with a fierce, defiant sort of enjoyment.

"Fanella," said the man, leading her back to the fire, "I will bless you forever for coming with me. I wanted you to see my home, to understand just how simple and unpretentious it is. I know I am only a common farmer, but I've always loved you, Fanella. I cannot endure it to see you live as you do, alone in that great house. Won't you let me take care of you, dear? I know I am not good enough for you. I realize what it must seem like to you here, but—"

"It is comfortable and beautiful, Nelson." Her voice broke over the words. "But I do not deserve it. I was not fair and honest with you—for I cared, always. I let my pride and my family interfere!"

"Oh," she cried, shaken by sudden, fierce sobs, "why did you never come back? They always do in stories—I could not believe it was all over when you went away!"

"Do you mean," said Travers, "that you would have given me a different answer if I had come back, Fanella?"

She held out her hands—true Fenway hands. "Don't you know, dear, that all women are privileged to change their minds?" she asked.

"What a fool I've been, Fanella," groaned Travers, holding her close. "Fifteen years! Tell me, when did you repent your coldness?"

"Before you had reached the gate," whispered Fanella, penitently.

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For the Old Folks.

Corra (aged ten), to Reggie (aged eleven).—Yes. The games are a wretched bore. But, then, it's Christmas, you know, and the old people do so expect to enjoy themselves.

The CHRISTMAS BRIDE

By IZOLA FORRESTER

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JUST in time for the wedding, Clive. Wish you merry Christmas! Gee, but it's bully to see you home again. Three years since you walked on this old platform, waiting for the down train. How have they treated you down east?"

"Fine, thanks, Mr. Dunkley," Clive answered heartily. "Whose wedding am I in time for? I want to load up with gifts."

"Guess you'll have to. It's in your own family. Bob finally got her."

Clive turned quickly as the old station agent went chuckling toward the express office trundling a truck of baggage. He followed him, his dark eyes keen and troubled.

"Got whom, Mr. Dunkley? I haven't heard any news from home for weeks. I've been abroad since June, and just got back in time to catch the express west for Christmas. So you see it's all a surprise to me."

"Surprise to all the town. Never thought Bob had the nerve to ask a girl to marry him, let alone that spunky little Lawrence one."

The name struck Clive like a whip-lash. He called good-night and hurried over to where the old station hack waited.

The driver called a cheery Christmas greeting to him, and he answered it, but as they swung up the long rock hill toward the town, he leaned back and shut his eyes and wished he had never come back.

Not that he had any hold on her. There had never been a formal engagement. He had no right to ask a girl to marry him when he was only a young cub just out of college with his standing to win first. But she had known, ah, but she had known well where he stood, and how he loved her. He could see her now, small and slender at sixteen, still in short skirts, her dark curls flying in the wind, deep dimples at the corners of her mouth, and the swift flashing smile that eyes and mouth and dimples joined in. Yet it had been more than beauty that had held him true through the years. There had been a look in her eyes, a look of abiding faith and clean, straight honor, that he had loved and trusted. The memory of that look had brought him back over the sea, to find her this Christmas and tell her that now he could claim her.

Bob! Stolid, good old Bob. While he had been playing globe trotter, trying to catch the flying heels of a madcap, wayward fortune, Bob had stayed quietly at home and won the girl he loved.

There in the dingy, chilly interior of the old hack Clive fought out his battle with himself. He would be game, he said; he would not mar their happiness with one word or look. He could not go back. There was his mother. He could not give up seeing her merely because Fate had given him a knockout blow, not exactly in the solar plexus, but a trifle to the left.

"All out," shouted the driver jovially, pulling up short before the great old mansion on the hill, with its barricade of tall pines, heavy now with snow. "Wish I was in Bob Patterson's boots tonight. Turned on some illumination didn't they? And, oh, listen to the band. Thank you, sir. That gives the missus and kids at home a little extra celebration."

Clive picked up his two suit cases and swung up the gravel path, heartened at sight of the brilliantly lighted rooms, and turned quietly around to the side door that he had had occasion to use many a time before when he had been out late larking.

It was unlocked, and there was no one in sight. It was still early, about 6:30. Probably the family was at dinner. Yet some one was playing softly in the long music room south of the library. He stood in the dimly lighted hall listening, old memories

sweeping over him. It was only a little quaint Christmas carol that Fay had always loved. Years ago, when she had first come to live with them, a little forlorn kiddie, orphaned and with no one but his father to act as guardian, she had loved that carol, and always sang it at holy time. He heard her voice now and gripped his hands as he listened.

Mark, the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King, Peace on earth and mercy mild—

She saw his figure reflected in the tall mirror and rose with a half-frightened cry.

"Don't, dear," he said, brokenly, hurrying to meet her. He forgot Bob and all he had heard, and saw only her. "I just got in—nobody knows I am here yet—why, dear—"

She was sobbing on his shoulder, her hands, wrung from his grasp, held his head against her cheek. Clive saw she was dressed in white soft satin that crushed under his clasp like bruised flowers; he felt he was robbing Bob, and yet there in the dear old room they both knew so well, in the tender winter gloom, he held her close, and kissed her—lips, hair, wet eyelids—and forgot all except the splendor of the night have been.

"They won't miss you," she managed to say finally, pushing back his face and holding it in her hands at a safe distance. "I'm so sorry—but you see I was thinking of you, and—"

And wanting to see you so, and then suddenly I looked, and you were here, right here, with me."

"And too late," he added bitterly. "Oh, no, you're not, Clive," she flashed back earnestly. "They haven't been married yet."

"They? Who?"

"Bob and Gretchen."

"Gretchen! Who the devil is Gretchen? I beg your pardon, Fay—you don't know what I've suffered—"

Isn't Bob going to marry you?"

She looked at him for a moment in utter shocked silence, then laughed at her old ringing, gay laugh that he loved.

"I marry Bob—Bob? You silly, silly—"

"Go ahead. Call me what you like. Who's this person Gretchen, anyway?"

"She's my cousin, Gretchen Lawrence. She came to spend her summer vacation with me, and Bob fell in love with her. That's all, Clive."

"Ah!" Clive sighed and drew her into his arms again. They would make it a double wedding just to pay him back for the misery of the last half hour. Yes, they would. And he'd go back and punch that old fellow's head down at the station for not telling him it was Gretchen Lawrence instead of Fay.

"Oh, Clive, let me go," she whispered. "They're all at dinner, and you know your mother—"

"I know all about it," said Clive, comfortably. He raised her chin gently and looked into the dear, true eyes he had trusted. Fay did not know all that lay behind that look, how, mentally, he knelt in all humility and asked for forgiveness. Yet all he said was:

"I forgot to wish you Merry Christmas, dear!"

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